CARE AND CULTURE OF SEED AND SEEDLINGS

Preparation for seed planting is very important. Personal experience has shown that young seedlings are very susceptible to damp-off and other fungus infections and that a sterilized medium is most satisfactory. This may consist of shredded and screened spaghnum, fine vermiculite alone or mixed with sharp sand or any mixture of these you prefer. Since there will be little fertility in the medium, any good soluble plant food may be used, always feeding from underneath. Keep away from weather and do not allow to become packed. Keep moist at all times but never wet. Never allow young seedlings to become chilled. Plant seed about one-half inch deep after soaking overnight. You may scarify lightly with a fine emery board or nick lightly with a razor blade to admit moisture and cause quicker germination. This is not recommended unless you know the exact procedure. Some will come up in ten days or less, while others may take several months. When seedlings show second or third set of leaves, they may be transplanted to quart cans or individual pots. When 12" to 18" high, they may be placed in large containers or in the open ground.

It is possible, and even desirable, to obtain the first blooms while in gallon can. Some will not bloom until trunk is 2" or larger, and then begin to bloom profusely, and some will apparently never bloom. Pay particular attention to the vigorous ones with good growth habits and foliage. While the bloom may not be outstanding, the breeding is there and another generation or even a self cross may produce your dream flower. Never neglect the weaker appearing ones. The seedling roots may be damaged or malformed and when grafted on vigorous stock, it may prove to be a satisfactory grower. Like in so many other flowers, the weaker seedlings may produce the superior blooms.

Above all, keep adequate records on each plant, using any system that is brief and accurate, so that a glance at the label will tell the story without having to consult voluminous notes.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN SEEDLING BLOOMS

Suggested by Bruce Parnell

1. Is it Different? To resemble a named variety is not enough. It must be definitely superior in important characteristics to be worth propagating.

2. Will it Grow? With a minimum of care, will it make a reasonably good bush with adequate foliage?

3. Is it reasonably free flowering and does it hold buds well? Nothing is more disappointing than a nice plant that refuses to set buds or sheds them under normal conditions.

4. Honestly, ask yourself "Would I BUY this variety from a commercial source, if it was in competition with other standard and new varieties?"